



Birds of Aruba



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Could that dresser become a kitchen cabinet? The art of upcycling old furniture

By **KIM COOK**
Associated Press

Maybe it's a scratched-up old sideboard found at a yard sale and turned into a snazzy media console. Or a couple of well-traveled vintage trunks given a new home as bedside tables. Designers and DIYers are breathing new life into old furniture, not just restoring but reimagining and giving hardworking pieces fresh purpose. Sustainability, cost, aesthetics and sentimentality are all driving the trend. The craftsmanship seen in many old pieces—solid woods, dovetail joints, paintwork perhaps—means you're giving a second life to something already good. And there's the satisfaction of having a decorative and/or functional piece that nobody else does.

"I think the patina and age of these pieces would be hard to replicate with newer pieces, and they make each of these feel special," says designer Debbie Mathews Leroy in Nashville, Tennessee, who put a stone sink top on a rustic French table for a client's powder room. She placed a marble top on a French bamboo cabinet in her own home's guest bathroom.

Jessie Tristan Read, an artist and up-cycler in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, combines contrasting styles. "I like



Chicago-based interior designer Elise Metzger found this dresser years ago at a roadside shop near her college in NH. It's had other colors, mosaics on top, and different handles over the years, but now wears a cheerful pink (Benjamin Moore's Raspberry Glace) and sits in her daughter's room.

to see an antique or vintage chest of drawers used in a chic kitchen," says. "You immediately add warmth and charm while gaining great storage for utensils, linens, even pots and pans."

How to buy vintage

Noel Fahden is a vice president at Chairish, an online marketplace for vintage art and home furnishings that has featured items like frames from the wooden wheels of old carts trans-

formed into benches, architectural columns turned into candle holders, and lamp bases made from brass fire extinguishers and old railroad lights.

Fahden has some tips for buying vintage:

"Don't skip the measuring tape—measure twice, then measure again. That dreamy vintage armoire loses all its charm if it won't fit through your front door," he says. Ask questions and do research.

Learning about a piece's backstory might help you decide how or how much you want to transform it. "And don't overlook the finish," Fahden cautions. "Sun fading, water rings or smoke damage can be costly—or impossible—to fix, even if the piece looks charming in photos."

Courtney Batten of Paige Studio in Dallas says, "I generally steer clear of pieces made with MDF (medium-density fiberboard) or lami-

nate or pieces that have clearly been in a smoker's home."

Make big changes, or hardly any

You can go big on the upcycling, removing interior shelves on a cabinet, say, or changing legs on a table, but you can also do just a tiny tweak.

"Swap out hardware" like knobs, says Read. "This easy trick creates a fresh look while keeping the piece intact. Or add a top. A butcher block or piece of marble atop that dresser-made-kitchen-island creates functionality."

There was one common conversion many designers mentioned, but Batten's cautious.

"Contrary to popular belief, repurposing a dresser into a bathroom vanity, while beautiful, isn't actually very budget-friendly," she says. "The plumbing modifications required often drive the cost up more than buying a new prefab vanity. So if you have your heart set on a vintage vanity, keep in mind that it's for style, not savings."

More repurposing ideas

Old general store, post office or watchmaker cabinets with lots of cubbies and drawers make great storage for stationery, toys, and craft and pet supplies. □



Kristen Bell arrives at the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, at The Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, Calif.

Associated Press

Kristen Bell returning as host to SAG's Actor Awards

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Kristen Bell is returning as host of the Screen Actors Guild's Actor Awards for a third time.

The Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the union that presents the annual awards, announced Wednesday that Bell will emcee the March 1 awards, formerly known as the SAG Awards. Though the ceremony has often gone without a host, Bell was their first host in 2018 and she returned again last year.

"I've enjoyed hosting the show every time, so it was an easy decision to come back for a third," Bell said in a statement. "What I'm most excited for is the fact that I'll be doing what every actor does best ... sing."

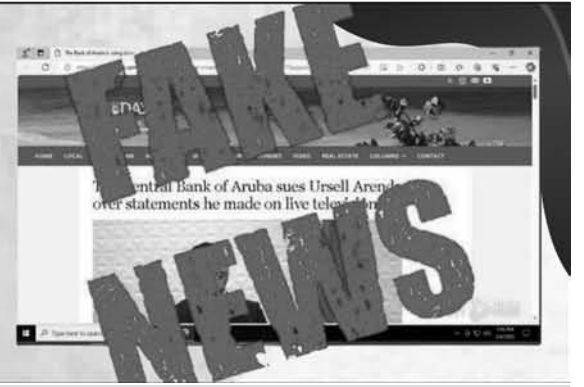
Netflix will again stream live the awards from the Shrine Auditorium & Expo Hall in Los Angeles. "One Battle After Another" leads all nominees with seven nods, including for best ensemble. The other nominees for the guild's top award are: "Sinners," "Hamnet," "Marty Supreme" and "Frankenstein."

"Having Kristen return to host feels like welcoming back a member of the family," said Jon Brockett, showrunner and executive producer for the awards. "One you actually want to hang out with." □

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This undated image provided by Maxime Aubert shows handprints with sharpened fingertips in the Maros region of Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Associated Press

Indonesian handprints are the oldest cave art found yet

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN
AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Handprints on cave walls in a largely unexplored area of Indonesia may be the oldest rock art studied so far, dating back to at least 67,800 years ago. The tan-colored prints analyzed by Indonesian and Australian researchers on the island of Sulawesi were made by blowing pigment over hands placed against the cave walls, leaving an outline. Some of the fingertips were also tweaked to look more pointed. This prehistoric art form suggests the Indonesian island was home to a flourishing artistic culture. To figure out how old the paintings were, researchers dated mineral crusts that had formed on top of the art.

Upon seeing the new study, independent paleoanthropologist Genevieve von Petzinger said she “let out a little squeal of joy.” “It fits everything I’d been thinking,” she said.

Indonesia is known to host some of the world’s earliest cave drawings, and scientists have analyzed countless examples of ancient art across the globe including simple marks on bones and stones that go back hundreds of thousands of years. Cross-hatched markings on a piece of rock in South Africa have been dated to about 73,000 years ago. The new art from southeastern Sulawesi is the oldest to be found on cave walls. The stencils also represent a more complex tradition of rock art that could have been a shared cultural practice, said study author Maxime Aubert with Griffith University, who published the study Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

Scientists are eager to understand when early humans learned to make art, moving from dots and lines to more meaningful representations of themselves and the world around them. These cave drawings help firm up a timeline for

the dawn of human creativity. It’s not yet clear whose hands made the prints. They could be from an ancient human group called Denisovans who lived in the area and may have interacted with our Homo sapiens ancestors before eventually going extinct. Or they may belong to modern humans venturing away from Africa, who could have wandered through the Middle East and Australia around this time. Fine details on the cave art, including the intentionally modified fingertips, point to a human hand.

Other drawings discovered in the same area of the island, including a human figure, a bird and horse-like animals, were found to be created much more recently, some of them about 4,000 years ago. There’s likely more art to be found on nearby islands that could be even older than the handprints. □



Amanda Darrow, director of youth, family and education programs at the Utah Pride Center, holds a copy of Kabobe's graphic memoir “Gender Queer,” on a stack of other books that have been the subject of complaints from parents on Dec. 16, 2021, in Salt Lake City.

Associated Press

We Need Diverse Books launches Unbanned Book Network to fight school bans

By HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A grassroots organization founded to increase diversity in publishing is launching a program to counteract the nationwide wave of bannings in schools and libraries. On Tuesday, We Need Diverse Books, or WNDB, announced the formation of the Unbanned Book Network, which will donate books by authors who have been banned and select Author Ambassadors for school districts facing bans. WNDB plans to start with 20 “under-resourced” schools in states where bans are most prevalent, including Texas and Florida.

“We’re not only facing an ongoing literacy crisis in the U.S., we’re also battling increased rates of censorship, which is infringing on our students’ right to read,” WNDB’s CEO, Dhonielle Clayton, said in a statement. “WNDB will tackle these issues head-on with the launch of the Unbanned Book Network, demonstrating the power of diverse literature to transform young lives and our communities.” Author ambassadors will include Ellen Oh, LeUyen Pham and Meg Medina, all of whom had their books banned or restricted.

According to PEN America and the American Library Association, bans have surged over the past four years, with Maia Kobabe’s “Gender Queer,” Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye” and George M. Johnson’s “All Boys Aren’t Blue” among the most commonly challenged. □

This just in from The New York Times: Its first 2-player game, and an evolving business model

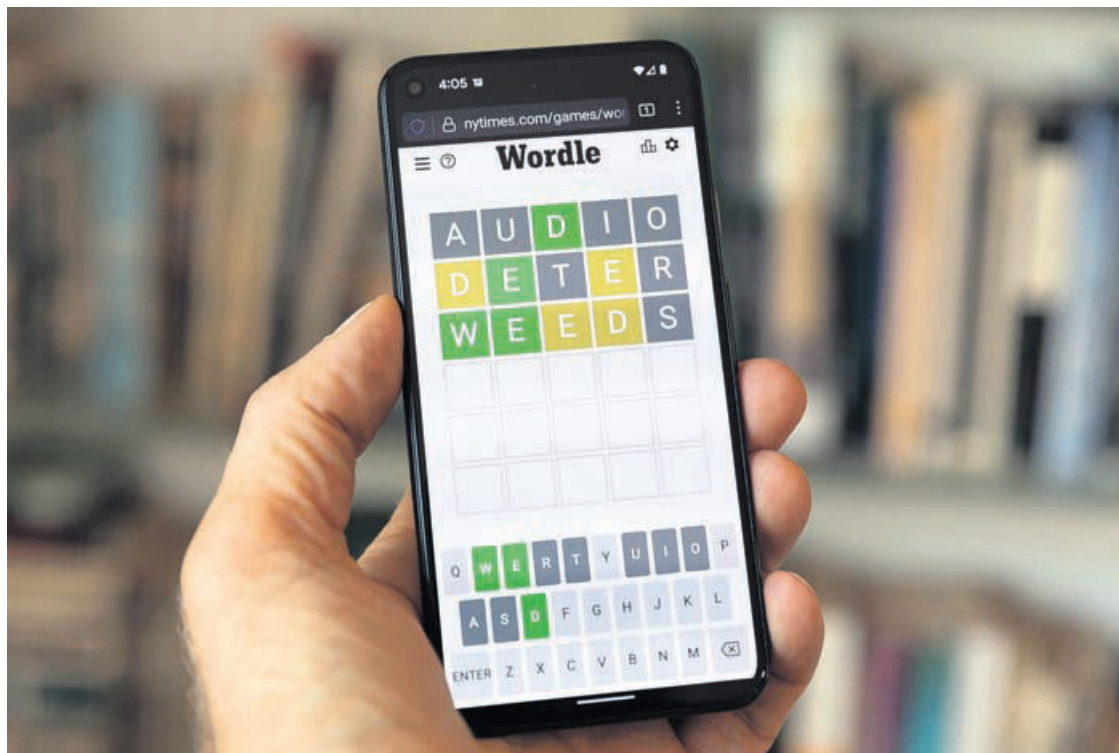
By **DAVID BAUDER**
AP Media Writer

For subscribers to The New York Times who are as interested in solving Wordle or filling in the crossword puzzle as in reading the latest political or business news, Wednesday is a big day.

The Times' popular Games unit is debuting Crossplay, a Scrabble-like electronic feature that represents its first designed multiplayer game. It becomes the website's 11th game, joining a lineup of puzzles that were collectively played over 11.2 billion times in 2025.

Ancillary products like Games, a cooking app and the Wirecutter product recommendations have fueled remarkable digital growth at The Times over the past decade.

"It has been a huge boon to the journalism," said Dan Kennedy, a Northeastern University professor. The Times says it has about 3,000 journalists on staff, its most ever and more than twice what it had a decade ago. It is thriving at a troubled time for the industry: More than 350,000 journalists worked at U.S. newspapers in 2005, and that number was down to 91,550 last year, according to Northwestern University.



A Wordle game is seen on a mobile phone, July 15, 2022, in Boston.

Associated Press

Kennedy tries the crossword puzzle on its easiest day. His Scrabble-loving daughter is likely to be excited about Crossplay. He loves Wirecutter, which on Tuesday touted cat beds and a vibrator that doubled as a necklace. His wife regularly uses the Cooking app, where thousands of recipes for all occasions are available.

"As remarkable as it's been, I kind of scratch my head at the other news organizations that have tried to replicate it," Kennedy said. "It

just seems like they were so thoroughly beaten to this idea that it's hard for them to compete."

A solar system revolving around the news

The Times likens itself to a solar system. The newspaper is the sun, with the other products the planets revolving around it.

Some have jokingly referred to it as a game company that happens to have news. The research company YipitData reported in 2023 that subscribers spent

more time in Games than they did with the digital newspaper (the company didn't respond to questions about whether it had more current data).

The Times reported 12.33 million subscribers by the end of last September, up 9% from 2024 and all but about a half million of them digital. Subscription revenue for digital-only products increased by 14%. About half of Times subscribers buy a \$30 monthly package that bundles all of its products, the rest buy

portions of what it offers a la carte. Last year saw a decrease in people subscribing to just the news.

"I now get out of bed in the morning knowing that the work I do is advancing the mission that we have as a company seek the truth, understand the world, keep the journalists independent and well-funded," said Jonathan Knight, the company's head of games. "If I can play a role in that, that's incredibly rewarding."

Puzzles, contests and games aren't novel for newspapers; The Times introduced its crossword puzzle in 1942 and it went digital in 2009. It was late last decade when its spelling bee game proved popular, particularly among people intimidated by the crossword.

The game-changer for The Times' Games app

Times executives realized the potential and rebranded its app in 2020. But the game-changer came in 2022.

Developed by a Brooklyn software engineer named Josh Wardle, the addictive puzzle known as Wordle requires players to guess a five-letter word by eliminating potential letters. □

NASA astronaut who was stuck at the space station for months retires within a year of returning



Astronaut Suni Williams is interviewed at Johnson Space Center on March 31, 2025, in Houston.

Associated Press

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's Suni Williams one of two astronauts stuck for months at the International Space Station has retired.

The space agency announced the news Tuesday, saying her retirement took effect at the end of December.

Williams' crewmate on Boeing's ill-fated capsule test flight, Butch Wilmore, left NASA last summer.

The pair launched to the space station in 2024, the first people to fly Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule. Their mission should have lasted just a week, but stretched to more than nine months because of Starliner trouble. In the end, they caught a ride

home last March with SpaceX.

Boeing's next Starliner mission will carry cargo not people to the space station. NASA wants to make sure all of the capsule's thruster and other issues are solved before putting anyone on board. The trial run will take place later this year.

Williams, 60, a former Navy captain, spent more than 27 years at NASA, logging 608 days in space over three station missions. She also set a record for the most spacewalking time by a woman: 62 hours during nine excursions.

NASA's new administrator Jared Isaacman called her "a trailblazer in human spaceflight."

"Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement," he added in a statement. □

As fires in Chile burn, a mobile clinic fights to save furry survivors

By NAYARA BATSCHE

Associated Press

LIRQUÉN, Chile (AP) —

Some are frightened, others are dehydrated, most are burned. In order to provide aid to the furry friends and other animals affected by the raging fires in Chile, the national police's canine brigade and teams of volunteers are working against the clock to provide first aid to the pets caught by flames.

"Our main goal is to help animals that have been rescued, found in the rubble, in the ash, or that managed to escape with their owners but suffered injuries due to this massive fire," Angiella Scalpello, a veterinarian from the canine squad of the investigative police, told The Associated Press. Inside a small van, Scalpello and other veterinarians are treating cats, dogs and other animals in a makeshift clinic. Almost all of them arrive with burned whiskers and paws, thirsty or suffering from conjunctivitis caused by the toxic fumes after spending days under the debris of what once were houses, ve-



A police officer carries a dog named Negra to a mobile veterinary clinic in area damaged by wildfires in Lirquen, Chile, Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026.

hicles or schools. The small town of Lirquén in south-central Chile was ground zero for the devastating fires that have been burning for days. With around 20,000 inhabitants, the fire consumed 80% of the city. Nationwide, the fires have left at least 20 dead and nearly 300 injured, official data shows. Many of the furry patients treated in the

mobile unit were found in the aftermath of the deadly fires.

"We usually find cats that were sheltering in small corners and that survived both the fire and the days that followed," said veterinarian Juan Vivanco, who also works in the unit.

Although the blaze is for now under control in Lir-

quén, the strong smell of burning and fine ash dust still cover its narrow streets. While the town assesses the damage and debris removal efforts continue, more animals are expected to be rescued in the coming days, according to Vivanco. But the longer they wait, the less likely they are to survive. "We've also found several pets already

deceased... it happens regularly," he said.

Once they arrive at the mobile unit, the pets receive IV fluids, a vital signs checkup and have their wounds taken care of. The most severe cases are sent to veterinary hospitals. "We've transported four or five puppies, in addition to three kittens. The last kitten we brought in yesterday (Monday) really touched us, because it had all four paws and its tail burned," said volunteer Vanessa Morales. "We took it to an emergency center." Many residents also go to the mobile clinic seeking help for their pets who are suffering from stress or injuries.

Little dog Chica managed to escape the flames thanks to her family's quick thinking when they evacuated their home last Sunday. The house was completely destroyed, but the family were safe and sound despite sustaining minor injuries. However, the senior poodle began to experience some discomfort in her eyes, so her owner Kevin Carrasco decided to seek professional help. □

Associated Press

Survivor of Spain's train crash pleads for help finding her dog Boro, and social media users rally

By TERESA MEDRANO

Associated Press

MADRID (AP) —

Blanket draped over her shoulders and a bandage on her cheek, Ana García issued a desperate plea: she needed help finding her dog, Boro.

Hours earlier, 26-year-old García and her pregnant sister had been traveling with Boro by high-speed train from Malaga, their hometown in southern Spain, to capital Madrid. The tail of their train car jumped the rails for reasons that remain unclear, then was smashed into by a train coming in the opposite direction and that tumbled down an adjacent slope.

At least 43 people died in the crash and more than 150 were injured, including some right in front of García. Rescue crews helped

her and her sister out of the tilted train car.

García saw Boro briefly, then he bolted.

After receiving medical treatment, a limping García told reporters she was going back to find him.

"Please, if you can help, look for the animals," she said, choked up and holding back tears. "We were coming back from a family weekend with the little dog, who's family, too."

In the aftermath of one of Spain's worst railway disasters, Spaniards on social media rallied to find Boro and major Spanish media outlets have reported on the search for the missing mutt.

Thousands amplified García's call, sharing video of her interview. Photos of Boro, a medium-sized black

dog with white eyebrows and a tuft of white fur on his chest, went viral alongside phone numbers for García and her family. The Associated Press was not able to reach anyone through

these numbers.

Television broadcaster TVE's filming of the crash site Monday afternoon brought a jolt of hope: for a few short seconds, a

dog resembling Boro could be seen running through a nearby field an area fenced off while investigators and rescuers continue their search for victims and evidence. But no one managed to locate the elusive pup.

The search intensified on Wednesday when an animal rescue patrol coordinated by an animal rights political party was authorized to enter the accident perimeter. An environmental agent from the Civil Guard spotted Boro alive and well and then tried to catch him, but the dog fled into the woods, according to a statement to the AP.

Social media was already anticipating a much-desired happy ending, with dozens of posts declaring: "Boro has been located!" □



A woman holds a sign reading in Spanish, "Missing Boro. Lost during the Adamuz accident. Any information is helpful," about a dog that went missing during a train crash in Adamuz, southern Spain, Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026.

Associated Press

Catholicism shrinks in Latin America while more are religiously unaffiliated, Pew surveys find

By **LUIS ANDRES HENAO**
Associated Press

Catholicism in Latin American countries has shrunk over the last decade, while a growing percentage of adults identify as religiously unaffiliated, describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular."

Those are among the key findings in a report released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center based on surveys conducted in early 2024 of adults in six of the region's most populous countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. "Our analysis found that the Catholic share of the population in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru which collectively make up about 75% of Latin America's population has significantly declined since 2013-14, while a growing share of adults in the region are religiously unaffiliated," said Kirsten Lesage, a Pew research associate and the lead author of the report. Most Latin Americans are Christian, and Catholicism remains the dominant religion. But the exodus from the church continues in a region that was once a stronghold for the Catholic faith and has close ties to Pope Leo XIV, who served for decades in



Pope Leo XIV, then Apostolic Administrator of Chiclayo Robert Prevost, preaches during a Corpus Christi celebration in a stadium in Chiclayo, Peru, June 19, 2015.

Associated Press

Peru before being elected in 2025, and his Argentina-born predecessor, Pope Francis.

The survey found that Catholics make up 46% to 67% of the adult population in these six countries, and the percent who are religiously unaffiliated ranges from 12% to 33%.

But the share of Catholics has declined in each country over the past decade by at least 9 percentage points. Meanwhile the percent of

adults who are unaffiliated rose by 7 percentage points or more, the survey found. "In fact, there are now more religiously unaffiliated adults than Protestants in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico," Lesage said.

A decade ago, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru all had Catholic majorities: about 6 in 10 or more adults in each country identified as Catholic, the report says.

Today, about half of Brazilians and Chileans identify as Catholic. About two-thirds of Mexicans and Peruvians are Catholic, as are about 6 in 10 adults in Argentina and Colombia, but all of those majorities are smaller than 10 years ago.

The rise of the nones

The Catholic church's strong influence has eroded in Latin America following clergy sex abuse scandals and opposition to the church's stances

against abortion and LG-BTQ+ rights. Many, in countries like Argentina, now seek spiritual answers beyond the church in yoga, tarot, astrology and beliefs outside religion.

In a decade, the share of adults who are religiously unaffiliated increased significantly across the region, rising as high as about one-quarter of adults in Argentina and Colombia.

A decade ago, the Pew survey focused on how Latin Americans born into Catholic families had increasingly left the faith for Protestant churches, while many others had dropped organized religion altogether in a major shift in the region's religious identity.

But since then, Protestantism has remained "relatively stable" across Latin America, according to Pew's analysis. In Brazil which has the largest percentage of Protestants of the six countries surveyed 29% of adults now identify as Protestant, compared with 26% in 2013-14.

The major shift is among those with no affiliation. The analysis found there are now more religiously unaffiliated adults than Protestants in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. □

Olympic visitors to Milan get a rare chance to glimpse restoration of a long-hidden Leonardo gem

By **NICCOLÒ LUPONE**
Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — In honor of

the Milan Cortina Olympics, Milan cultural officials are for a brief time only al-

lowing visitors access to a long-hidden wall and ceiling painting by Leonardo da Vinci while restoration work is underway.

The vast painting of a pergola covered with intertwined flowering branches inside Milan's Sforza Castle is concealed behind a six-meter (nearly 20-foot) towering scaffolding in the Sala delle Asse. Letters establish that Leonardo started the work, but it's one he left unfinished.

"In 1498, he had to flee because the French arrived in Milan, and after that date it was covered over, hidden," said Luca Tosi,

heritage curator at Milan's landmark Sforza Castle, which is in the same Sempione Park where the Olympic flame will burn during the Feb. 6-22 Winter Games.

In another sign of Leonardo's impact on Milan, the Olympic cauldron itself is inspired by the Renaissance genius' geometric studies, officials announced this week.

Under the French, the castle became a military barracks and the painting, which covers the ceiling and part of the wall, was covered with plaster. The work was only rediscov-

ered early last century, when restorers removed the plaster and filled in color to match Leonardo's work.

"As a result, Leonardo scholars no longer recognized them as a true Leonardo, but rather as a repainted Leonardo, somewhat a fake, to use a popular term," Tosi added. Visitors will be able to climb up the scaffolding and view the restorers at work during a brief window from Feb. 7-March 14, after which it will be closed to the public again for another 18 months to complete the work. □



Stefania Negro works on restoring the Sala delle Asse, part of the newly created Leonardo da Vinci itineraries inside Milan's Sforza Castle, Italy, Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026.

Associated Press

Ever heard of the cah'i orgel? A key instrument in Aruban folklore music

(Oranjestad)— The cah'i orgel music box is an important and unique instrument that is used on the ABC islands in the Dutch Caribbean. This instrument is a staple in our folklore music, and its significance in the traditions of Aruba has and continues to bring together the old and young.

The origin of the cah'i orgel is said to have come from Europe around 150 years ago. A cross breed between the barrel piano and the organ, the most popular stories said that the instrument came from either England or Germany, but made its way to Italy down to Venezuela, where in 1881, Mr. Horatio Sprock (1866-1949) from Curacao was first introduced to it. After that, Sprock made his own cah'i orgel "Josefina", and successfully debuted it on the streets of Barquisimeto. Back in Curacao, he started his own cah'i orgel business along with his brother Luis. In Aruba, it is said that the cah'i orgel was introduced by Rufo Wever, who later in his career became one of the composers for the Aruban national anthem.

Rufo Wever was a young musician in 1937 when he established his own cah'i orgel business on the island. Before that he experimented with his uncle's cah'i orgel, and he over the years he learned to build and repair the instrument. In fact, he was incredibly skilled in this, and he was one of the few to have recognized from the start that the cah'i orgel is an instrument that needs preserving.

As mentioned, the cah'i orgel is a music box. Made from mahogany wood, it contains a cylinder with a maximum of eight music pieces. By rotating the lever on the front side of the box, the cah'i orgel produces music similar to that of a piano, and is accompanied often by someone else playing the "wiri", a percussion instrument made out of steel and reminiscent to the Spanish guiro. Back then, you would often also find someone playing the triangle alongside the cah'i orgel and wiri. In Aruba, the cah'i orgel and wiri is used for traditional music genres, such as the Aruban waltz, tumba, mazurka and more.



Fun fact: another name for the cah'i orgel is the "tingling box." □

Source: "E Cilinder Magico entre Aruba y Curaçao" by Marilyn Alcalá-Wallé, Herta Parabirsing-Balentina and Nidia Rosaria-Wallé.

Surf's Up: Favorite places to catch waves in Aruba



ORANJESTAD – Whether you are a salt-seasoned surfer looking for a thrill, or just looking to wet your toes in a little ocean adventure, Aruba has amazing places to learn and practice surfing! Although more known for the calmer waters of Palm Beach, Eagle Beach and Mangel Halto, Aruba also has some special places to thrill your senses. Because of strong winds and breezes, Aruba is perfect for wind and kite surfing. You will surely notice kites in the air as you drive around the wilder, rougher areas on Aruba's east side.

There are plenty of surf shop rentals to help you with your gear, and there are also a lot of tutors if you're looking to try for the first time and need a little help. These can be found around the island, and will surely come in hand if you want to try a new experience!

With that said, here are Aruba's favorite surf spots!

Andicuri

Andicuri is recognized as the best place for body boarding. Because of the rough waves, this beach is better suited for those with more experience in surfing. However, the beach with two bluffs – one on each side – is worth a visit, if only to watch the exciting show presented by the surfers.

To go to Andicuri, you will need a 4x4 vehicle and drive from the ex-Natural Bridge Center. Alternatively, you can make it an adventure by going on a hike! The scenery is unique and beautiful on its own.

Reaching Andicuri Beach can be an adventure in itself, as it can be difficult to find and is only accessible by 4x4 vehicle or walking from the ex-Natural Bridge center, but the impressive scenery makes it all worthwhile!

Arashi

Arashi, a beach located close to the California Lighthouse, is a good spot for learning and having fun – if you're lucky! The waves at Arashi are usually calm, but with just the right weather, a swell forms attracting all the local surfers to the area.

Boca Grandi

Boca Grandi is at the most southern spot in Aruba, and is a popular spot with experienced surfers. Close to the famous Red Anchor

and our beloved Sunrise City – San Nicolas, a trip to Boca Grandi can easily turn into an all-day trip to this area of the island. With a beautiful beach (although it is not allowed to swim here, because of strong currents), you can enjoy a relaxing time combing the beach for driftwood, coral, and little crabs and snails.

Hadicurari

Here is where you will find most of the action for surfers in Aruba. With a variety of surf shops and schools in this area, you will find it easy to get in on the action. Hadicurari is also the site of the Aruba Hi Winds World Challenge, which takes place usually in June/July, and it is the largest windsurfing competition in the Caribbean!

Malmok

If you're a beginner, this is your spot. There are also various shops to rent gear and receive lessons, facilitating learning and just trying out a new experience. The beach is also popular for paddleboarding and other watersport activities. □



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Don't miss out on L'Avenue's Early Bird Special!



(Oranjestad)—Up to grab an early dinner after a day of shopping or cruising? Take advantage of L'Avenue's Early Bird Special, and experience their innovative twist of traditional Belgian cuisine!

Located in a cozy nook at The Cove Mall—a short walking distance from the Holiday Inn and Paseo Herencia, this Belgian and French bistro offers a delicious and rich menu available through lunch and dinner from 11am to 10pm. Enjoy your lunch and/or dinner in a cool, air-conditioned interior area of the restaurant, accompanied by the warm lights and chic design that emphasizes the restaurant's laid-back, yet sophisticated ambience.

Lunch includes a variety of sandwiches—with a healthy selection of bread options—if you're going for a light meal, but just like their dinner selection, also includes



steak, chicken, fish, and even mussels and rabbit if you're craving a bit more of L'Avenue's exquisite menu. And let's not forget their wide selection of Belgian beer and European wine to complete the tasty experience!

But that's not all! L'Avenue is offering their guests their Early Bird Special, available



every day from 4pm to 7pm. Enjoy this affordable and delectable 3-course meal special at a comfortable price of \$32 per guest, including a glass of house wine.

L'Avenue honors and takes pride in serving the traditional Belgian and French flavors, but does not shy away from offering a flexible menu for their guests' needs. That's right, L'Avenue also offers to cater for their guests' dietary restrictions, making sure that each guest gets well taken care of!

More information

L'Avenue is situated at The Cove Mall in Palm Beach and is open every day from 11am to 10pm for lunch and dinner. To book a reservation or ask for more information, please contact their phone line at +297 6996400, send an e-mail info@lavenuearuba.com, or visit their website at lavenuearuba.com □



The Hartmann Hansen family: "Aruba is our place on earth"

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Tomas, Eliana, Catalina and Agustin Hartmann Hansen from Argentina.

They wrote to us saying: "Aruba is our place on earth, where we enjoy our vacations as a family, with friends and always be amazed by the sunshine, lovely people and the beach. Looking forward for visiting more frequently with the new direct flight from Argentina!"

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! □

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Visit the island's popular cave sites!



(Oranjestad)—Among the endless sea of dark brown sand and cacti, there are two caves hidden in the outskirts of San Nicolas, in the north-eastern area of the island. These caves, The Quadiriki cave and The Fontein Cave are open to visitors of the Arikok National Park, so if you ever decide to take an "off-road" tour in the park, be sure to visit these prehistoric caves.

Quadirikiri Cave

Known for its two chambers accompanied by a skylight, the Quadiriki Cave is the most popular cave among locals and tourists, as it is easy to walk through and provides great lighting for pictures.

Woman in Quadirikiri Cave, Arikok National Park, Aruba
As with all prehistoric or ancient sites, there is always a folk legend that adds to the lore and mystery of the site. The Quadirikiri cave is no different. The most well-known legend behind the cave could be consid-

ered as Aruba's first love story, as it tells the tale of the undying love between the chief's daughter and her beloved. As legend would have it, the chief disapproved of his daughter's choice of lover, as he thought him unworthy. Stubborn and filled with anger, the daughter refused to turn away her beloved.

So, the chief decided to lock her up in the Quadirikiri Cave, in hopes that she would soon calm down and turn away her lover. Her beloved, in turn, was locked away in the Tunnel of Love (Now known as the Huliba Cave).

Through the pathways underneath the Tunnel of Love running up to the Quadiriki cave, the two love birds found each other, and refused to let each other go. Because of their stubbornness, they both died in the Quadiriki Cave, their ascending spirits burning two holes in the ceiling of the cave. This is why the cave has two holes through

which sunlight passes through to illuminate the chamber.

Though there have been discoveries of Amerindian drawing on the wall, these have mostly been ruined by vandalism. However, the Fontein Cave further up north, provides a better glimpse in prehistoric Amerindian paintings.

Fontein Cave

Longer than the Quadirikiri Cave, the Fontein Cave contains pathways that stretch to the limestone walls further down. Here is also where prehistoric drawings can be seen. Though this cave does not have its own legend, this was speculated to have been occupied—or at least used by prehistoric Arawak settlers on the island for rituals and other spiritual ceremonies.

The Huliba Cave/ Tunnel of Love

The Huliba Cave, formerly known as the Tunnel of Love, was once open to



the public, and was the biggest and most accessible of all three caves. This cave had five chambers, including one that is heart-shaped. This cave had narrow stairs that led to long pathways deep into the cave, with a staircase leading to the exit on the other side. In one of the chambers, there used to be the carving of the Virgin Mary, put there for the protection of the cave.

However, the Huliba Cave has been permanently closed for a few years now, as a way to preserve the bat population that lives

in the cave. These Long Tongue Fruit Bats and Insect Eater Bats are very important to the ecosystem of the island. Though this cave is no longer accessible to the public, it surely is interesting to learn more about the history of these caves and the Arawak tribes that resided or utilized them.

Do note that these caves are very dark, humid, hot, and are inhabited by bats. Do wear comfortable clothing and shoes, as the pathways in these caves may be rough and bumpy. Take care to not disturb the bats' habitat. □



Forgotten gems: Open air movie theaters

(Oranjestad)—During the span of over 100 years, Aruba only saw five open air movie theaters. Now practically obsolete on the island, these theaters were once frequently visited by locals and migrants in the 20th century.

The first open air theater was constructed in 1920 and was commissioned by Shon Eduard (Eddy) de Veer. This theater was located at the Hotel Colombia in Oranjestad, which is now where the Aruban census office is located. The theater was simple; it only consisted of a screen, and visitors had to bring their own chairs to enjoy the popular silent movies of the time.

American migrants who



worked in the refinery and lived in the Lago Colony in Sero Colorado also had their piece of the pie with their Open air Theatre, which formed part of the

Esso Club, also known as the Pan-Am Club. It was at this theater that "Talkies" were first streamed, movies with sound. This theater mostly streamed American

blockbusters for the American expats, this way making sure that these migrant were not missing out on entertainment from their home land.

In the 1950's and 60's, Savaneta saw their own open air theater, located in front of the Marinier's Kazerne (Marine Barracks). This theater was mostly visited by the neighboring marines, who didn't have much entertainment other than movies at that time.

The last and most recent open air theater was constructed in the form of a drive-in theater. A popular American concept, the Drive Inn located in Balashi was a hot spot for teenagers, who had the habit of cramming all their friends in

one car to go see the movies. For this phenomenon there was a separate price that you had to pay called the "car crash".

This theater closed around 2012, but was re-opened during the pandemic in July 2020, where movies were streamed on a gigantic screen set up in front of stacked containers. However, this nostalgic form of entertainment did not last very long as it was closed again only a year or two later. Nowadays you can still see the stacked containers when you drive near the bridge in Balashi. □

Source: "De kolibrie op de rots en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba" by Evert Bongers.

Birds of Aruba

ORANJESTAD — On May 11th, 2010, the Aruba Bird-life Conservation was founded with the aim of protecting the biodiversity in general and birds in and around Aruba in particular.

Among other things, the foundation will focus on increasing the survival chances of species of wild birds by promoting their preservation and conservation. The foundation publishes the most beautiful pictures of local birds on their social media that show us the beauty of Aruba's birds and nature in general. Aruba Today gives you a little peek with

the following pictures and descriptions from the foundations Facebook page.

The Great Egret

Serenity in Aruba's National Park, a Great Egret flying in peace. When it is peaceful and quite, beautiful things start happening in nature.

Canadian in the house

The breeding season is over and it's getting pretty cold in North America. Shore birds have started moving southwards as early as July. This wetland beauty wants to keep its toes warm. Our Canadian friends know exactly where they can do so best. A Greater Yellowlegs



rediscovering Aruba's Bubali Wetlands.

Cabochon

In its living form of so much more value than any gemstone. Aruba's smallest and most master of flight. A top pollinator. A hovering Blenchi inspecting the human who just entered his territory. English: Blue-tailed Emerald (male) Dutch: Blauwstaartsmaragdkolibrie (mannetje).

Aruba's to enjoy. Aruba's to protect. □



The stories of “Compa Nanzi”

(Oranjestad)—The most popular character you may hear about in the Caribbean is Anansi, known locally on Aruba as “Compa Nanzi”. Local children grew up hearing the tales of the conniving spider, and his legacy forms part of the oral narrative tradition that is common in Aruba.

Although the stories are most popular in the Caribbean, “Compa Nanzi” is not entirely unknown globally, especially not in the West African region. Brought to the “new world” by enslaved Africans from Ghana, the historical thread of how Nanzi was introduced on Aruba follows the enslaved Africans in Curacao during the colonial era, which saw the biggest population of enslaved Africans in the Dutch Caribbean.

The stories of Compa Nanzi were a sign of hope for freedom among the slaves, who passed around different stories involving the famous spider through word of mouth, due to not being able to express their native culture in the new world. These stories were a way to not only preserve their culture, but it acted as a medium for relief during the harsh treatment to which they were subjected to.

It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that the stories of Nanzi were written down in different languages. However, not all stories are completely alike in every country, as is the risk of oral story telling. However, one thing will always be dominant in Compa Nanzi's stories: his sneaky ways to get what he wants!

How Nanzi fooled the king
One day Nanzi was taking a stroll near the castle of Shon Arei, the king. He had this sudden urge to walk in. He didn't think too much about it and committed to what he had in mind. It was a warm afternoon, and the castle personnel were taking their afternoon nap. Even the soldier guarding the castle door was fast asleep, snoring so loud that his beard bounced up and down on his chin. Nanzi just slipped past him, looked back for a moment then walk

right on in.

Nanzi stumbled upon the king's quarters. With all his excitement he sat in the king's throne, and put on his crown that was hanging on the side of the throne. It was very hot that day, and it wasn't long until Nanzi too fell asleep, right there on the king's throne. He was so deep in sleep and snoring so loud, that even when the king found him in his seat, Nanzi did not even notice.

Shon Arei was flabbergasted by the sight of Nanzi on his throne, wearing his crown. How disrespectful! “Soldiers, get him!” he commanded. Nanzi was sound asleep, but when the soldiers picked him up, he jumped from fright. By then though, the soldier already had him in their hold.

“Put him in a sack, stitch it up and throw him in the ocean!” the king said furiously. Two soldiers immediately entered the chamber, took the crown off Nanzi's head and pushed him in a sack.

Nanzi was terrified; it looks like this time he won't get away with his schemes. To get to the ocean, the soldier walked a long distance, and where beginning to feel very thirsty. Luckily they passed by a pub, and decided to have a nice cold beer. They set the sack with Nanzi in it outside and went to enjoy the refreshments. Nanzi was still trembling with fear in the sack.

What is that he hears? A herd of sheep walking by?
“Compadre, listen here!” Nanzi screamed as loud as he could. The sheep herder got close to the sack. “What is this?”

“Man, there is something very beautiful in here that you can see. It's very rare and strange, but indeed, there is something so beautiful in here that you've never seen or will ever see,” Nanzi told the herder.

The herder, very dumb, believed Nanzi's word. “Let me see!” he said.
“Well if you must insist,” Nanzi said, “I'll let you take a look, but only for a quick sec-

ond.” The herder opened the sack, and Nanzi immediately jumped out. Before the herder could even take a look into the sack, Nanzi pushed him in it, and the herder fell head first in.

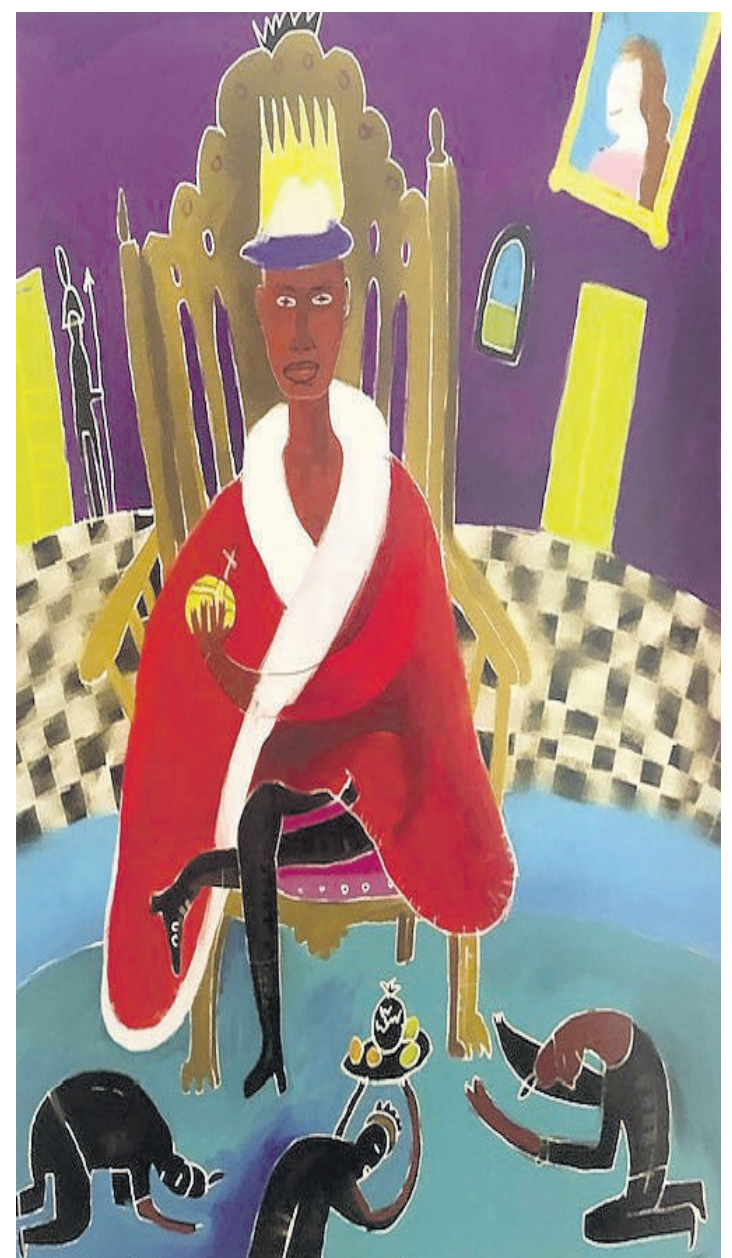
Nanzi didn't waste any time, and closed off the sack real tight. He then picked up the herder's hat and starting walking behind the traveling sheep as if nothing happened. After a little while, the soldiers headed back outside to continue their journey. As they picked up the sack, the poor herder started screaming to let him out, but the soldiers ignored him, thinking it was Nanzi.

Shon Arei went strolling a while later. He thought to himself: “This time Nanzi could not get away with his foolishness. He probably drowned in that sack ages ago.” That is why, when he saw Nanzi walk behind the herd of sheep on the street, he was flabbergasted again. “Nanzi! Aren't you suppose to be at the bottom of the ocean floor?”

“I was, Your Majesty,” Nanzi replied. But you know what; there are so many things to see down there in the sack! Like this herd of sheep. Seeing that they had no herder, I started walking behind them and gained their trust pretty quickly. At the bottom of the ocean there are so many wonderful things, like diamonds, and bags of gold. Chests of silver and other precious stones,” Nanzi told the king.

“What is that you say?” the king was intrigued. “I want to see it too!”
The king immediately demanded to his soldiers to be put in a sack and be placed in the ocean. Naturally, Shon Arei died because of this. He was never found again. Nanzi followed the soldier back to the castle, where sat once again on the late king's thrown and put his crown on. He took possession of all of Shon Arei's belongings, and lived the rest of his life as king.

Story and pictures are from “Kon Nanzi a Nek Shon Arei (i otro kuentanan antiano di e araña sabi)” by Nilda Pinto.



CROSSWORD

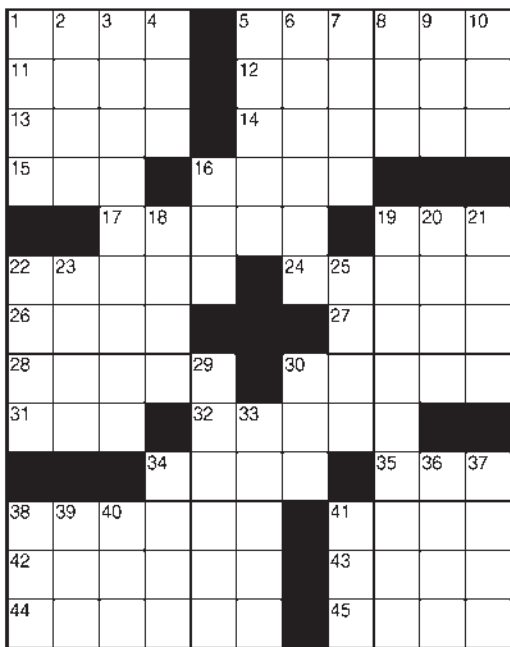
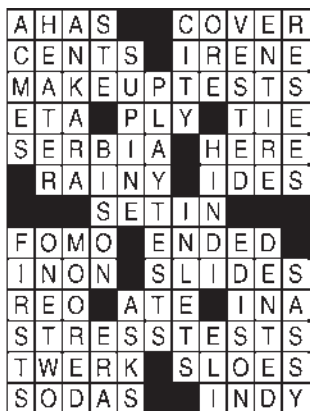
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 44 Not so small
1 Smell
5 Cube face
11 Haleakala setting
12 Screen sight
13 Choir voice
14 Poker plays
15 Role for Keanu
16 Stately trees
17 Bowling round
19 Motor need
22 Further down
24 Impudent
26 Steel ingredient
27 School near Windsor
28 A googol has 100
30 Yankee Stadium setting
31 Inquire
32 Geometry class challenge
34 Put together
35 Touch lightly
38 Teem
41 Edison's middle name
42 Hotel area
43 Enter the regatta

DOWN

- 1 Yemen neighbor
2 Secluded valley
3 Unemployed
4 Brazilian city
5 "Beat it!"
6 Trembles
7 "Exodus" author
8 Wagon puller
9 Fish eggs
10 Hosp. sections
16 Galley item
18 Nevada city
19 Like some foul hits
20 File stand-in
21 Bobcat's kin
22 Minnelli of "Cabaret"
23 Valuable rocks
25 Flying start?
29 Dish-washing aid
30 "—"
33 Contract addition
34 Psychologist Carl
36 Gung-ho
37 Account
38 Maximum amount
39 Frilly wrap
40 Owned by us
41 Blond shade



2-1

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-1 CRYPTOQUOTE

CV ZXCG HK HZHUV CWZLWVX.

VWR JHMMGE CV YXLPGT.

STGSXTG LW EHG. — "LPG

STHZDGKK ATHEG"

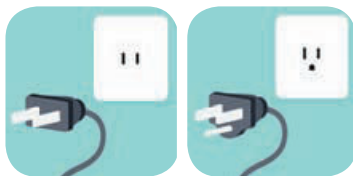
Cryptoquote: LIFE MOVES PRETTY FAST. IF YOU DON'T STOP AND LOOK AROUND ONCE IN A WHILE, YOU COULD MISS IT. — "FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF"

Cruise ship Schedule: Jan. 24 - 28 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
SAT	24	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	B	1
		EVIRIMA	08.00	21.00	C	1
SUN	25	FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
MON	26	BRITANNIA	08.00	16.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL SPIRIT	09.00	22.00	C	1
TUE	27	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1
WED	28	CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE	08.00	23.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	11.00	20.00	C	1
		CARNIVAL VISTA	13.00	23.00	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★

1/22

Answer to previous puzzle

1	4	8	6	5	2	7	9	3
3	7	9	8	4	1	5	6	2
2	6	5	7	3	9	4	8	1
6	3	2	4	9	7	8	1	5
7	9	1	5	8	6	3	2	4
8	5	4	1	2	3	9	7	6
5	1	3	2	7	8	6	4	9
4	2	7	9	6	5	1	3	8
9	8	6	3	1	4	2	5	7

Difficulty: ★★★

1/21



This 2023 image provided by Shany Dror shows a labrador named Augie in Texas.

Associated Press

Some dogs can expand their vocabulary by eavesdropping on their owners

By **ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN**
AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Dogs are great at learning action commands like “sit” and “stay.” They’re less good at remembering the names of things, like what their squeaky or stuffed toys are called.

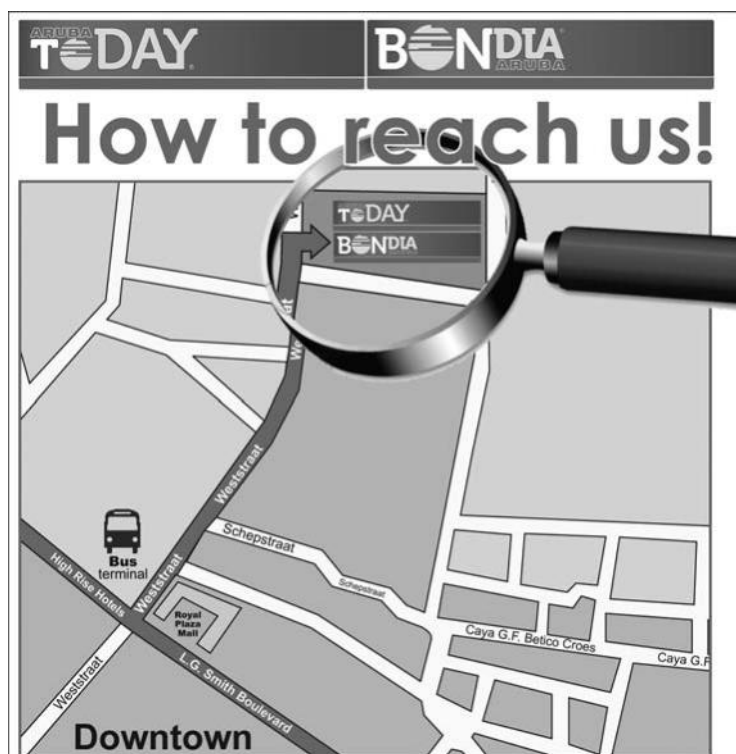
Only an elite group of gifted word-learner dogs can retain the names of hundreds of toys. Scientists know of about 50 such pooches, but they aren’t yet sure what’s behind their wordy skills.

Now, new research is pushing the limits of what the dogs can do.

Scientists already knew that these extraordinary pups could learn the names of their stuffed pizza and doughnut toys from playtime with their owners. In the latest study, they discovered that the pups can also understand new names by eavesdropping.

Ten gifted dogs including a Border collie named Basket and a Labrador named Augie watched their owners hold a new toy and talk to another person about it. Then the pups were told to go to another room and retrieve that specific toy from a pile of many others.

Seven out of the 10 dogs successfully learned the names of their new toy stingrays and armadillos from passively listening to their owners. □



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EMERGENCY

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Sta. Cruz	527 2900
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Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

TAXI SERVICES

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Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	524 2424
American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

AID FOUNDATIONS

Aruba Food Bank
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FAVI- Visually Impaired
Tel. 582 5051
Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952
Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989
Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Beware of online ads with elaborate backstories. They may not be from a real small business

By **MAE ANDERSON**
AP Business Writer

Melia & Co appears to be a small family-run business. The sweaters on its website feature a photo of a woman hand-knitting a Christmas design. The caption says that after decades of creating knitwear that tells "quiet stories of care and beauty," she is closing her little studio and the pieces on offer are her last.

The website of Olivia Westwood Boutique also spotlights a charming backstory. The "About Us" section states that twin sisters run the shop their mother opened in 1972 and share her commitment to a business "rooted in family, community and women uplifting women." Shoppers could take advantage of a sale honoring the boutique's late founder on what would have been her 95th birthday.

But neither store is what it



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Aruba Bank N.V. Acc. #332668
Caribbean Mercantile Bank N.V.
Acc. #23951903
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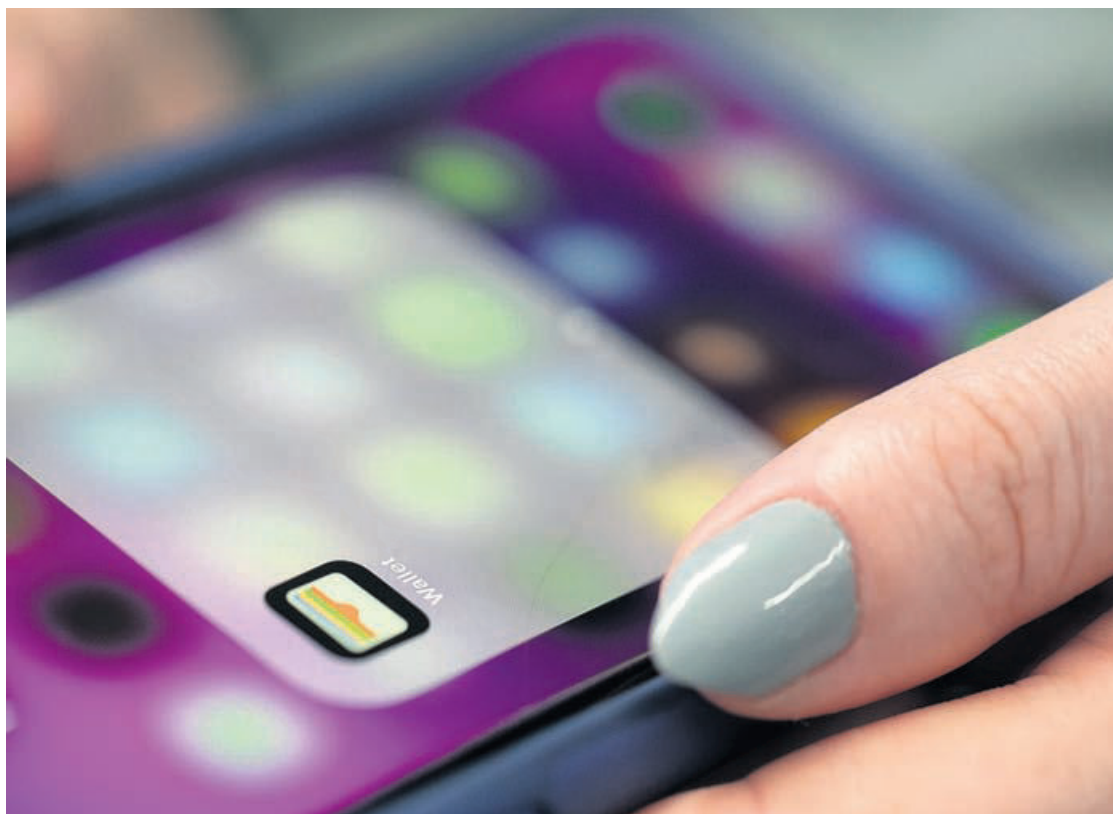
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A person uses an iPhone on Oct. 8, 2019 in New York.

Associated Press

appears. Both display many of the same Icelandic, Nordic and festive sweaters with identical stock images. Their website domains were registered in China in November, ahead of the holiday shopping season. Negative reviews of both proliferate on consumer review websites such as Trustpilot, where users report receiving shoddy goods that were difficult to return.

Melia & Co. did not return a request for more information about the owners. A close look at a pop-up ad describing Nola Rene, the 72-year-old Swedish knitter who is supposedly hanging up her knitting needles, reveals the word "advertorial" at the top and at the bottom, a disclaimer saying the people in the photos are models. At least three other shopping sites also sell the sweaters "lovingly hand-knitted in small batches."

Olivia Westwood Boutique responded to an email query about where it was based and who owned the business by saying it was an online boutique "working with trusted global fulfillment partners to serve our customers."

Online shopping scams are not unusual. About 36% of Americans failed to receive refunds after purchasing an item online that they said never arrived or turned out to be counterfeit, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in April 2025 and published in July. Faster and more sophisticated digital tools are only making it even harder for consumers to spot if what they are seeing is too good to be true.

Some vendors and fraudsters have taken advantage of AI-generated images to create websites that have an aura of artisan authenticity or that point to a long history as a trusted small retailer, said Seth Ketron, a marketing professor at The University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

"It's getting more and more common," Ketron said. "If you're not careful or you're really paying close attention, or you don't really even know what to look for or what AI photos look like, it's easy to kind of just gloss over or miss that it's probably not real."

Misleading e-commerce ads often pop up on social media feeds or appear as

banners on other kinds of websites.

Experts say there are some simple steps shoppers can take to distinguish a legitimate small merchant from a suspicious one before clicking "buy."

Check for verifiable details
Deanna Newman owns C'est La Vie, an online jewelry retailer in Ontario, Canada, and learned about mall-business impersonation scams the hard way. A person claiming to have received low-quality goods from her site left an irate comment on Newman's Facebook page. Alarmed, she looked but she could not find a record of the order.

Newman concluded a scammer was using the name of her store for several shopping sites selling jewelry. When people went online to complain about inferior products, they landed on her site. There were C'est La Vie websites claiming to have brick-and-mortar locations in New York, Birmingham, England, Dublin, Ireland, and other cities, which didn't actually exist. "Sometimes people were receiving products from China and very low-grade

jewelry, and then some people weren't receiving things at all," Newman said.

She dealt with the complaints, put a warning on her Facebook page and online shop about the misleading C'est la Vie web sites, and posted videos on Instagram and TikTok to demonstrate she was a real person with a real business. Some of the copycat sites were taken down. But an influx of poor reviews and complaints nonetheless hurt her sales, she said. Newman advises shoppers to look for a verifiable address or other details that may indicate a site is authentic. When in doubt, reach out to the owner by email, phone or contact form. If they are genuine, they should be happy to reply, she said.

"It's hard, because the consumer has to do a little bit of research on their side, but I would say, too, that if it looks too good to be true, it probably is," Newman said.

Beware a sob story

Including fake hardship stories along with ads is one technique online scammers use to draw in potential buyers. Common ploys include announcing a "going-out-of-business" sale or a sale to honor a late son, daughter or grandmother. Newman said the people who assumed her company's name employed multiple versions of this gimmick, including having a close family member pass away. A customer who contacted Newman expressed sympathy for the loss of her son.

"I realized that they thought that I was the scam website," she said.

"So I was like, 'Well, the good news is you haven't been scammed because I'm sending these products, but the bad news is, you purchased from me thinking you were supporting somebody who's going through something hard.'" □

Record crowds witness Sabalenka, Alcaraz, Gauff and Zverev advance at Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)

— Another day, another record crowd. Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka and Carlos Alcaraz advanced in straight sets Wednesday and the No. 3 seeds Coco Gauff and Alexander Zverev also progressed to the third round of the Australian Open.

The combined numbers for day and night sessions, 103,720 fans, set a full-day record for the third time in four days of the main draw at the season-opening major, which has become a festival of tennis.

Two-time Australian Open champion Sabalenka opened Day 4 with a 6-3, 6-1 win over Bai Zhouxuan on Rod Laver Arena, and Gauff beat left-hander Olga Danilovic 6-2, 6-2 at Margaret Court Arena.

Alcaraz fended off Yannick Hanfmann 7-6 (4), 6-3, 6-2 in an afternoon encounter on the center court, and then reflected on his own performance and on his golf outing with Roger Federer.

"I didn't see myself playing that good but then talking to my team, I realized that I played better than I thought," he said of his tough outing against the free-hitting Hanfmann. "I'm still getting used to the conditions, getting used to playing better."

Alcaraz, 22, is trying to win his first title at Melbourne Park to become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam.

Zverev, who lost last year's



Coco Gauff of the U.S. falls during her second round match against Olga Danilovic of Serbia at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026.

Associated Press

final here to Jannik Sinner, had to wait through a half-hour rain delay and concern over a sore left ankle before beating Alexandre Muller 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

He was leading the fourth set 2-1 and serving at 15-0 when he had to halt the match and sit in a court-side chair for treatment.

"I took a painkiller. It was fine after that," he said. "I was a bit scared because it was toward the Achilles tendon. I just wanted the physio to check it out. After the medical timeout I was moving fine, playing fine."

He was playing a night match on John Cain Arena, the third of Melbourne Park's arenas with a re-

tractable roof, where only ground pass tickets are needed for entry. So on a day with a massive crowd, it was still full late.

"The atmosphere is insane. The crowd is wild," he said. "I love playing here."

Local hope Alex de Minaur beat Hamad Medjedovic 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-2, 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena around the same time.

"I weathered the storm. He was hitting the ball really big and deep," said de Minaur, who is aiming to end a long drought for Aussie men at the home Grand Slam event. "I'm super happy to battle my way through."

He next faces No. 29 Frances Tiafoe, who beat Francisco Comesana 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.

Women's draw

Sabalenka won the Australian Open in 2023 and 2024 and was the runner-up a year ago against Madison Keys. She is after her fifth Grand Slam title and has two trophies at the U.S. Open.

She raced to a 5-0 lead but then needed seven set points to take the first set against the defensive-minded Bai, who used clever drop shots to help her stay in the match. Sabalenka will next face Anastasia Potapova, who

ousted former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu 7-6 (3), 6-2.

Teenagers Mirra Andrejeva (No. 8), Victoria Mboko (17) and Iva Jovic (29) advanced to the third round. The 12th-seeded Elina Svitolina defeated Linda Klimovicova 7-5, 6-1 a day after her husband, Gael Monfils, said goodbye at Melbourne Park in his retirement year.

Zeynep Sonmez of Turkey, who was highly praised during her first-round match Sunday for assisting an ill ballkid, advanced 6-2, 6-4 over Anna Bondar.

"I really appreciated there were many Turkish people, and I felt like I was at home," she said. "At first I couldn't even hear my own thoughts. It was very, very loud."

Men's draw

Former U.S. Open winner and 11th-seeded Daniil Medvedev beat Quentin Halys 6-7 (9), 6-3, 6-4, 6-2, 13th-seeded Andrey Rublev beat Jaime Faria 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 and 19th-seeded Tommy Paul defeated Thiago Agustin Tirante 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

No. 10 Alexander Bublik, No. 25 Learner Tien and No. 26 Cameron Norrie progressed along with No. 14 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who won the first two sets but then had to struggle to beat big-serving American Reilly Opelka 6-3, 7-6 (3), 5-7, 4-6, 6-4. □

American Hockey League and Professional Hockey Players' Association ratify CBA



A hockey puck rests on the ice during the second period of an NHL hockey game Feb. 2, 2022, in Elmont, N.Y.

Associated Press

By The Associated Press

The American Hockey League's Board of Governors and Professional Hockey Players' Association's full membership have ratified a collective bargaining agreement that ensures labor peace in the top layers of the sport in North America for the foreseeable future.

The AHL and PHPA announced the final step in the process Wednesday. The CBA, like that of the NHL and ECHL, is good through the summer of 2030.

"We have long had a positive relationship with our players and we look forward to continuing to work with the PHPA so that the league and our players can grow and prosper for years to come," AHL president and CEO Scott

Howson said.

The AHL agreement came together with little consternation, unlike the ECHL negotiations that led to a two-day strike out of the league's holiday break in December. The ECHL and PHPA then worked out a CBA of their own, after 28 games had been postponed.

The AHL, the top developmental league that feeds into the NHL, is in the middle of its 90th season.

"This agreement delivers important gains for our members while providing long-term certainty across the league," PHPA executive director Brian Ramsay said. "This was a collaborative and disciplined bargaining process that resulted in a strong agreement for our membership." □

In the NFL, winning seasons and playoff appearances don't always equate to job security

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

Winning isn't everything. Winning the Super Bowl matters most.

Sean McDermott became the latest coach to learn that harsh reality when the Buffalo Bills fired him after falling short in the playoffs for the seventh straight season.

McDermott led the Bills to the playoffs eight times in nine seasons, but they didn't make it past the AFC championship game, losing twice to Kansas City.

Now, Buffalo looks for a coach who can help the franchise capture its first Lombardi Trophy.



Buffalo Bills head coach Sean McDermott leaves the field after an NFL divisional round playoff football game against the Denver Broncos, Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024, in Denver.

Associated Press

back James Cook was the NFL's rushing champion. The defense was No. 1 against the pass.

There's plenty of talent on the Bills. But the team needs to find the missing piece. It's not just the head coach. General manager Brandon Beane, who was also promoted to president, needs to give Allen more playmakers. The Bills lack an elite wide receiver. It's been their primary need since Stefon Diggs was traded to Houston after the 2023 season.

Stroud's future

C.J. Stroud threw four first-half interceptions in Houston's 28-16 loss to New England in the divisional round and the Texans failed in their seventh bid to reach the AFC championship game.

After winning AP NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2023, Stroud has regressed. Still, he's led the Texans to playoff wins in each of his first three seasons.

The Texans need to give Stroud more help. The offensive line struggled and the run game was nonexistent. Stroud was also missing standout receiver Nico Collins against the Patriots and lost tight end Dalton Schultz early in the game.

"The quarterback position is going to get the most eyes, most attention. We understand that," Texans coach DeMeco Ryans said. "In this league, that's what it is. C.J. understands that as well. Throughout the season, I thought he did a really nice job of coming in and learning a new offense, new scheme. I thought he picked it up well. We got better as the season went along and he made some plays to allow us to win a lot of football games as well. I'm not going to let the bad plays there in that game (against the Patriots) dictate to me who C.J. is. I know who C.J. is. I know what he's capable of doing."

McDermott turned the Bills into a perennial contender, but couldn't secure that elusive Super Bowl victory so he's out. It happened to Tony Dungy in Tampa Bay, John Fox in Denver, Andy Reid in Philadelphia, among many others.

John Harbaugh was fired two weeks ago after missing the playoffs despite a successful, 18-year run in Baltimore that included winning one Lombardi. He quickly landed with the New York Giants.

Doug Pederson was fired by the Eagles following one losing season that came after three straight playoff appearances, including the franchise's first Super Bowl title.

Marty Schottenheimer was fired by the Chargers after the team went a league-best 14-2 in 2006 but lost in the divisional round.

Ultimately, it comes down to winning the biggest prize. There are only 32 head coaches in the NFL and not a lot of job security.

McDermott's abrupt dismissal opens an attractive vacancy in Buffalo. The next coach inherits 2024 AP NFL MVP Josh Allen, who is one of the best quarterbacks in the NFL. Running

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